

Marine Corps Readiness: The Cost of First-Term Dependency

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Title: Marine Corps Readiness: The Costs of First-Term Dependency

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Thesis: Ensuring success on the 21st Century battlefield demands that the Marine Corps persist in reevaluating its policies pertaining to dependency in the first-term force for trends or cost implications that may impact negatively on operational readiness.

Background: Beginning in the 1980's, Marine Corps leaders have become increasingly disturbed at the increase in the marriage and divorce rate among the first-term force. Their concern was based not only on the well being of Marine families, but also on the costs of maintaining a large dependent population and the impact on operational readiness. In 1993, ALMAR 226/93 addressed the leadership's concerns by establishing a policy that eliminated the accession of married individuals by 1996 and required that first-term Marines receive marriage counseling. The ALMAR was rescinded within one week of its release. The ALMAR did result in the conduct of two studies aimed at investigating the effects of marriage within the military services. Both studies came to similar conclusions. First, there was no established tool of measurement within DoD that monitored individual readiness. Second, both studies concluded that marriage did not degrade the readiness of the military. Various quality of life (QOL) deficiencies were identified as needing improvement, which were thought to influence only morale, not unit readiness.

Literature, studies, and articles were reviewed, and interviews conducted to determine what information was available on the negative impacts of first-term dependency, and to identify any possible solutions. It was concluded that the lack of a standardized measure for individual readiness within DoD makes it impossible to accurately determine readiness trends among the various first-term dependency cohorts. Additionally, the costs associated with maintaining a large first-term dependency population exceeds the Marine Corps annual budget allocation, thus resulting in conflicting funding priorities between QOL initiatives, equipment modernization, and operations and maintenance.

Recommendations: The Marine Corps needs to establish a system to monitor individual readiness, which can be directly related to unit readiness. The system should provide for the comparison of the variety of dependency cohorts within the first-term force, and serve as a basis for factual and logical arguments for future personnel policies. Objective data combined with subjective issues such as esprit de corps and unit cohesion, provided by an independent agency, would foster credibility in the event a change in dependency policies are determined necessary.

The cost of maintaining a large dependency population is fiscally burdensome for the Marine Corps. The Marine Corps must build a strong case for demanding an increase in its annual budget, or obtaining additional funding that will standardized QOL throughout the DoD. It is in the best interest of the Corps to accurately track and present the costs associated with providing for the welfare of its service members and families, and the costs of maintaining the high level of operational readiness.

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I

Maintaining the Trust

The Whole of military activity must...relate directly or indirectly to the engagement. The end for which a soldier is recruited, clothed, armed, and trained, the whole object of his sleeping, eating, drinking, and marching is simply that he should fight at the right place at the right time.

Carl Von Clausewitz

There is a strongly held view, within the United States national security bureaucracy, that the current degree of global destabilization will increase as the monopoly on violence is shifted from traditional nation states to the growing number of world wide non-state actors. The threat of a “breakdown of order” is expected to exist primarily in third world countries. However, as demonstrated by the Los Angeles riots, and terrorist attacks in Oklahoma City and New York City, large-scale civil unrest can occur within U.S. borders¹. Military estimates indicate increased challenges in the 21st century that will span the full spectrum of conflict ranging from military operations other than war (MOOTW) to conventional combat operations in high intensity conflicts. The onus is on the U.S. Military to prepare for the diverse environments in which it will serve. As Joint Vision 2010 proclaims:

We cannot expect risk-free, push button style operations in the future. Military operations will continue to demand extraordinary dedication and sacrifice under the most adverse conditions. Some military operations will require close combat on the ground, at sea, or in the air. The courage and heart of our soldiers, sailors, airmen, and Marines will remain the foundation of all that our Armed Forces must do.

“Marines are ready when the nation is least ready, Marines always get the job done, and the Marines are the masters of unfailing alchemy which converts unoriented youths into proud, self-reliant stable citizens, citizens into whose hands the nation’s affairs may

safely be entrusted.”² History has shown that these sentiments equate to America’s expectations of the Marine Corps: a level of trust between the protector and those protected. Maintaining trust demands that the Corps sustain a level of readiness, commitment, and capability that ensures certain success on tomorrow’s battlefields. The United States Marine Corps is a manpower intensive organization composed of approximately 155,000 enlisted marines two thirds of which represent marines serving in their first-term (4 years) of service.³ Consequently, it is the first-term Marines that shoulder the burden of the Corps’ operational reach and capability. Therefore, it is a worthwhile endeavor to study current Marine Corps personnel policies and initiatives as they pertain to dependency in the first-term force, to gain an appreciation for the negative impact current liberal policies have on the Corps’ ability to maintain the nation’s confidence and trust.

Before we can illustrate how dependency among the first-term force detracts from readiness we must clarify both the role of the Marine Corps in the overall U.S National Military Strategy, and the origins of dependency within the U.S. military as it pertained to all the services. We will describe why dependency has remained a major issue among Marines for the past decade in terms of the Corps’ attempts to meet its increasing obligations, both in maintaining readiness and taking care of its own. We will then analyze the results of the fact finding studies directed by both the Secretary of Defense and the Commandant of the Marine Corps to determine the extent of the first-term dependency problem. Finally, this paper will address some current Marine Corps initiatives, and provide additional recommendations, directed at managing a large first-term dependency population. The ultimate concern is that social welfare priorities will be

placed above the demands of mission accomplishment resulting in a less capable force at a time when the operating environment is becoming more complex and violent.

II

From the Halls of Montezuma....

“It must be considered that there is nothing more difficult to carry out, nor more doubtful of success, nor more dangerous to handle, than to initiate a new order of things.”

Niccolo Machiavelli

“Word came on May 27 that another revolution was in full swing at Bluefields, on the east-coast of Nicaragua. We received orders to leave at eight thirty in the morning and by eleven thirty were on our way, two hundred and fifty officers and men. Mrs. Butler had [gone] . . . to do some shopping. When she returned at noon, I was gone”

Smedley D. Butler

In the words of the 82nd Congress, the United States is in vital need for the existence of a strong force in readiness. This force has to be versatile, fast-moving, hard hitting, and in effect would serve as the nation’s mobile shock troops. Most importantly, as alluded to in the introduction, there exists a need for a force that is most ready when the nation is least ready. In response, for the last forty-seven years, the U.S. Marine Corps has served as the Nation's “by Law” force in readiness. It has done so by adhering to the following six Marine Corps core competencies: expeditionary readiness, combined arms operations, expeditionary operations, naval character, forcible entry-from the sea, and reserve integration. Of these competencies, the one that most notably sets the Corps apart from the other services as the nations “911” force in readiness, is its commitment to its expeditionary readiness.⁴

Expeditionary readiness reflects an institutional mindset that facilitates instantaneous response to worldwide crisis. Ready to respond means much more than being ready to go, it also demands a commitment and force capable of transitioning from peacetime to combat operations instantly, without critical reserve augmentation, and with

certain success. Expeditionary readiness also demands a force that is ready to flourish under conditions of uncertainty, being ready to adapt to whatever is "out there," and finding unconventional solutions to unconventional problems. The primary focus of expeditionary readiness is on the human rather than the technological dimension of battle. Finally, expeditionary readiness means being ever ready to defeat the "opponent after next" requiring a relentless commitment to innovation and change.⁵

The certainty, structure, and stability that the Cold War provided has disappeared, leaving in its wake a geo-political situation that has shifted from a bipolar global structure to multiple regional power centers with the United States serving as the single world superpower. In short, the end of the Cold War has resulted in a world characterized by widespread disorder and potential crisis. The ability to respond effectively and quickly to crises will be essential to the protection of U.S. interests. The 1996 non-combatant evacuation operation (NEO) conducted in Liberia by a rapidly assembled Marine Air Ground Task Force exemplifies the short notice response capability required to protect U.S. interests abroad. Crises that will threaten U.S. interests in the near future fall into three broad categories: disasters, disruptions, and disputes.⁶ Some of the opponents encountered in these operations will be traditional nation-states, but many will be non-state actors such as terrorist groups and international organized crime networks, all of which present new and unique challenges. "The enemies we are likely to face...will not be "soldiers,"... but "warriors"-erratic primitives of shifting allegiance, habituated to violence, with no stake in civil order."⁷

Maintaining the expeditionary mindset and capability in an environment of growing uncertainty requires substantial investments of time and resources. The

complicated and diverse “battlefields” anticipated for the future have given rise to terms and concepts such as the “Strategic Corporal” and the “Three Block War,” both of which imply greatly increased pressures and responsibilities placed on young forward deployed Marines. Restrictive rules of engagement (ROE) combined with the emotional challenges associated with humanitarian assistance operations will demand an increased level of maturity, discipline and training far beyond what is currently expected of junior Marines oriented on combat operations. The peacekeeping operation currently ongoing in Bosnia has provided many opportunities for U.S. “soldiers” to be subjected to abuse and violence at the hands of organized belligerents whose aim is to achieve strategic advantage over U.S. policy makers.⁸ Greater emphasis on individual as well as unit training will further tax the already limited off duty time of an “expeditionary” Marine. The fiscal demands of the 21st century expeditionary Marine Corps include the cost of not only increased training, but also greater on equipment maintenance and modernization. How the Corps intends to fight in the 21st century requires a significant financial investment.

Many critical ground equipment programs have been cut or modified to meet budget restrictions. For example, the Assault Amphibian Vehicle Reliability Availability and Maintainability/Rebuild to Standard (AAVRAM/RS) is a program focused on cost effectiveness. Its objective is to facilitate the transition from the twenty-five year old Assault Amphibian Vehicle (AAV) to the Advanced Assault Amphibian Vehicle (AAAV), a critical component of the Operational Maneuver from the Sea (OMFTS) Mobility Triad. Fiscally, the Marine Corps can only afford to convert 680 vehicles of the 1058 vehicle Approved Acquisition Obligation (AAO), or total combat requirement.

Approximately one third of the Marine Corps mechanized lift assets (i.e., AAV's) will forego the modifications required to optimally meet the successful transition requirements. The justification for not fully funding the AAVRAM/RS program will be measured in the degree of risk that the operational commander will be forced to accept by relying on substandard equipment.

Marine Corps equipment modernization and research and development accounts have been underfunded for more than seven years. Figure 2-1 illustrates that since 1993, funding for procurement has fallen short of the steady state level of \$1.2 billion needed annually to sustain the Corps.⁹ The extended period of underfunding has driven the recovery rate to \$1.8 billion per year. Fiscal Year (FY) 99 budget increases will help to assist in reversing the downward trend in modernization.

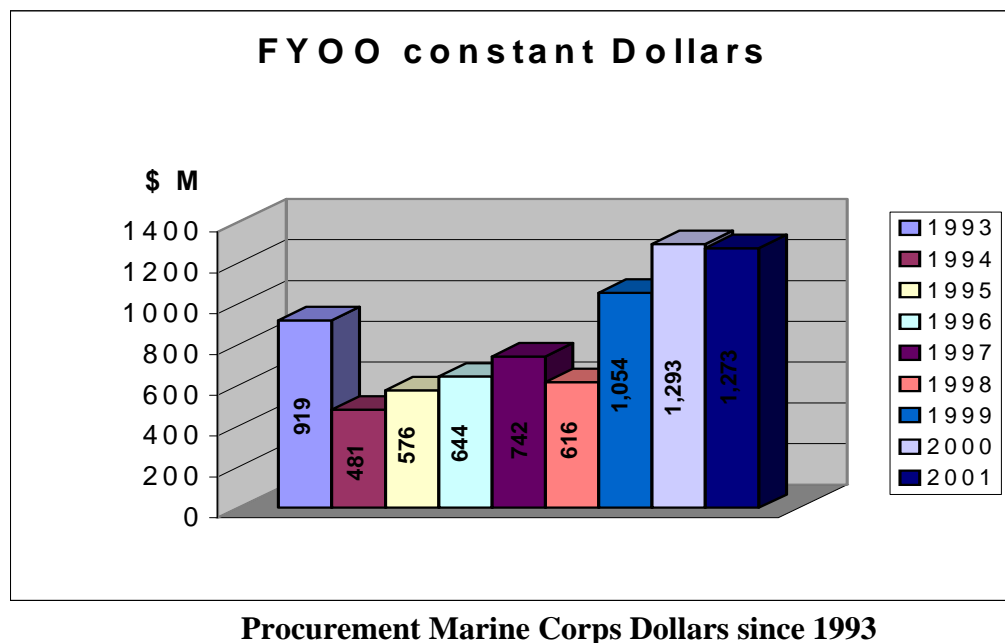


Figure 2-1

The Corps is expected to achieve the steady state funding level in FY00, and the recover level in FY05. The funding profile illustrated above includes Procurement

Marine Corps (PMC) for modernization of equipment, Procurement Ammunition Navy and Marine Corps (PANMC), and supplemental funding from Operation Desert Storm.¹⁰

Near term readiness has traditionally been met at the expense of modernization due primarily to limited budget flexibility. The tradeoff between readiness and modernization appears inconsistent with the 21st century vision held by the Joint Chiefs of Staff. “Joint Vision 2010 (JV 2010) is the conceptual template for how America’s Armed Forces will channel the vitality and innovation of our people and leverage technological opportunities to achieve new levels of effectiveness in Joint warfighting.”¹¹ The Marine Corps’ piece of the joint military vision is a widely publicized concept known as Operational Maneuver from the Sea (OMFTS). Based exclusively on the projection of naval power ashore, it further enhances America’s global power projection capabilities. However, as a result of the continual struggle to meet near term requirements, OMFTS in its conceptual form, may in fact be a bridge too far.

The fiscal challenges faced by today’s Marine Corps are consistent with those faced by the military throughout our country’s history. With the exception of wartime, the bottom line in the military has always been to maximize cost efficiency. The efficiency sought after was not only in the form of money spent on equipment, but on personnel as well. The next chapter will provide a historical perspective on how the U.S. Military struggled with managing the overhead of the force.

III

Maximizing Military Efficiency

Everything in war is simple, but the simplest thing is difficult. The difficulties accumulate and end by producing a kind of friction that is inconceivable unless one has experienced war.

Carl Von Clausewitz

Throughout most of its history the United States peacetime military has sought to keep the majority of its members single by either prohibiting the enlistment of married men, or by discouraging the marriage of careerist. In general, the military offered living conditions that favored a bachelor's life in order to maximize military efficiency. Military service, in the eyes of most, was not an endeavor that could afford the distractions of a wife or child. Suffering through continuous relocations, extended family separations, and the dangers associated with most military postings was assumed to be too hard on a family. In addition, enlisted men, especially those in the lower ranks receiving meager pay, were not thought capable of providing, at a sufficient level, for the well being or care of a family.¹² It was not until the early 1970's and the introduction of the All-Volunteer Force (AVF), that military pay and entitlements began to rival civilian wages and benefits.¹³

During periods of extended war most nations were unable to exclude any potential pool of eligible fighters, and therefore ultimately loosened enlistment restrictions. Examples of this extend as far back as the American Revolutionary War where anyone who could walk, talk, see, and hear was considered acceptable.¹⁴ Married and family men serving in the Continental Army were considered force multipliers, for they had a

strong stake in the outcome of the conflict. Soldiers with a commitment mattered significantly given that the British possessed military superiority. Conversely, those men with families were also the most likely to be deserters. The true reason for their high desertion rate was not fully understood, but was attributed primarily to the overall lack of training and discipline of the soldiers.¹⁵ “When they deemed the job was done, and the needs of their families called, they left, perhaps without thought that they were deserting.”¹⁶ In 1779, recognizing that many American soldiers and potential volunteers had families to support, General George Washington was authorized to augment the rewards for military service for those men with families. The American Civil War serves as another example of the reduction of enlistment standards to meet the overwhelming manpower requirements. The Confederacy through its Confederate Conscription Act, initially required all men between the ages of 18 and 35 to serve for three years. The conscription age would eventually be extended to 17 years and a maximum of 50 years as the war progressed.¹⁷ The Union Enrollment Act, in contrast, was a more refined process offering a variety of family hardship related exemptions. Furthermore, rules governing the order of induction deferred married men between the ages of 36 and 45.¹⁸ The contrast between Union and Confederate accession policies was due to a manpower advantage enjoyed by the Union. Eventually, like the Confederacy, the Union would have to revise its exemption and deferment policies to meet the manpower needs of the war.

As the military again shifted into relative peace after 1865, efforts to curb the presence of dependents remained unsuccessful despite the fact that the government made no provisions for support of a family beyond minimal allotments eventually distributed to

more senior enlisted service members. The pressures of recruiting, during this period, drove recruiters to ignore regulations against accepting married men, while many commanders lacked the insight or courage to deny their soldiers' request to marry.¹⁹ Historically, the naval services were the least attractive to the married men because of their assignment to ships, overseas detachments and austere conditions stateside. In contrast, land forces of the U.S. in the 19th century were more likely to be deployed in the states and not overseas. Generally, conditions in all the services were thought to be exceptionally harsh, and often cited as the primary reason for leaving the military through legitimate discharge or desertion.²⁰ Military conditions were thought to be so bad that American society largely held the opinion that it was "unlikely that a self respecting family man would expose a wife and children to a military way of life."²¹

World War II marked the dividing line in the manner in which marital status was treated in the enlistment process. In 1942, Public Law 490 was passed providing dependency benefits and family allotments to service members. In addition, the final outcome of the war set the stage (i.e., Cold War) for maintaining a large, standing, peacetime force, which characterized the American defense strategy during most of the latter half of the 20th century.²² Regulations aimed at marriage restrictions were redirected to look after the well being of dependents. Eventually, the term "Married" disappeared from the enlistment regulations, emphasizing instead the number of "dependents" declared by the applicant. The clear distinction was made that individuals may have dependents other than a spouse.²³ By 1953, one third of the Department of Defense (DoD) enlisted force was married which included 31 percent of the Army, 33 percent of the Navy, 27 percent of the Marine Corps, and 41 percent of the Airforce. By

1960 the DoD proportion of married enlisted service members had risen to 48 percent, ranging from 33 percent in the Marine Corps to 61 percent in the Airforce. For the first time the total number of military “dependents” within the DoD exceeded active duty personnel, a ratio that has continued over three decades.²⁴

The United States’ long-term commitment in Vietnam again caused many shifts in the Selective Service eligibility policies surrounding the issue of dependency related deferments. By the end of 1966 marriage and paternity deferments were for the most part rescinded by President Johnson.²⁵ As in past wars, the military was forced to loosen its service acceptability standards to meet the growing manpower needs overseas. In 1973, following the Vietnam withdrawal the DoD transitioned to the All-Volunteer Force (AVF) as a means of rebuilding military strength and its societal acceptance. With a new dependence on volunteers, enlistment regulations were refined to account for the different circumstances of marriage, divorce, dual service spouses, and single parents or guardians. Consideration had to be given to providing for the proper care of dependents. The increased participation of women was another major change brought on by the AVF requiring new gender neutral personnel policies.²⁶ By 1974 all services had lifted restrictions barring the enlistment of married women.²⁷ Manpower policies were no longer aimed at coping with married troops, instead emphasis was placed on helping and encouraging families through entitlements and family services.

In the past thirty years American society has radically altered its traditional family patterns to reflect increasingly diverse family situations with rising numbers of single parent families, female-headed households, unmarried mothers, cohabiting singles, remarried parents with step families, and dual career couples with young children.²⁸

Quite simply, what was thought to be the typical American family, mother, father, children no longer exists. Today's military has been forced to develop policies concerning enlistment to reflect contemporary America. Enlistment qualification policies like those outlined in the Marine Corps' Military Personnel Procurement Manual (MPPM), are in place for the purpose of verifying an applicant's dependency status to eliminate those who cannot balance the continuing demands of family and service.

In 2000, there are no DoD policies that specifically prohibit military personnel from being married. However, two categories exist that have continued to be exempt from the general policy. Students at the United States service academies are required to remain single, and Marine Corps Security Guards (MSG) in junior pay grades since 1949 have and continue to be prohibited from being married.²⁹ In the case of the Military Academies, married life is thought to be incompatible the demands and restrictions placed on Cadets/Midshipmen. MSG's are typically posted in high-risk environments, or are subject to hardship locations that are not suitable for families. Problems that occur, as a result of a service member's marital, or dependency status can in fact result in early separation or non-retention. Generally, a service member who is unable to meet the requirements of both service and family will most likely be discharged for reasons of hardship or possibly for misconduct.

Throughout its history the U.S. military has been comprised primarily of single men for the reasons described above. The life style, regulations, and mission responsibilities ensured for the most part an efficient military free from the emotional and financial overhead associated with maintaining a family. As a result of Public Law 490, and the adoption of the AVF, the enlisted force composition has changed drastically

where an unprecedented number of service members, have dependents of some kind. Enlisted, retention, and performance policies of the present day military have become very complicated due to society's acknowledgment and acceptance of the modified definition describing the American family.

The current DoD policies designed to accommodate care and welfare of the military family facilitate competition with the civilian workforce for quality personnel, but present serious challenges to the services who must also maintain military efficiency and operational readiness. It is those policies that in an environment of a downsizing military and a continually shrinking budget that forced the Commandant of the Marine Corps to aggressively pursue actions to preserve the quality and capability of his Corps.

IV

Opening Pandora's box

I think the Army is much more connected to society than the Marines are. The Marines are extremists. Whenever you have extremists, you have some risk of total disconnection with society. And that's a little dangerous.

Sara Lister, Former Assistant Secretary of the Army for Manpower and Reserve affairs.

Over time, since the adoption of the AVF, Marine Corps concerns over combat readiness and quality of life issues grew as the number of Marines marrying, especially in the junior ranks, began to increase dramatically. Increased incidents of missed deployments or early returns from deployments among all Marines fueled discussions among the senior leaders of the Marine Corps. The 1992 General Officer's Symposium and the following 1993 Russell Leadership Conference concluded, "married Marines in the first-term of service or initial four year enlistment are becoming an increasing administrative burden and a real threat to readiness."³⁰

Manpower and Reserve Affairs (M&RA) at Headquarters Marine Corps was tasked with studying the first-term dependency issue. The study determined that in the ten years since 1982 the number of Marines with dependents has grown approximately 80 percent, with the largest growth occurring in the junior enlisted pay grades E-1 through E-5, with the largest increase in E-3 through E-5.³¹ Two thirds of the Marine Corps enlisted force structure traditionally has been, and continues to be, comprised of first-term Marines in the pay grades of E-1 through E-5. The concern for growing dependency rates in the first-term force has been found to be valid because of the potential negative impact on

unit training and deployability with regard to cost in both combat readiness and fiscal resources.

Prior to the drawdown in the early 1990's the Marine Corps maintained a deployment rate of approximately 43 percent to maintain a forward deployed "911" global presence. The deployment burden of the Marine Corps is carried primarily by first-term Marine. Projections made by Plans, Policies and Operations (PP&O) at Headquarters Marine Corps in 1993, increased the post drawdown deployment rate to approximately 57 percent, focusing primarily on infantry battalions which possess the largest first-term population by Military Occupational Specialty (MOS).³²

Family values and stability within the first-term force were major concerns of the leadership. The average age of a first-term married Marine in 1993 was 21.9. The age of dependent spouses during the same time frame ranged between 17 and 20 years old, but in some cases they were as young as 15 years old.³³ In many cases the young marriage is quickly followed up with at least one child. Therefore, high deployment rates for first-term Marines with dependents generally require extraordinary dependent care due primarily to immaturity and financial insecurity. Based on the problems encountered by unit leaders and family service centers, it was posited that many young wives lack the life experiences (i.e., managing a limited budget and children) to function independently while their sponsor is deployed. Often times the first-term marriage will not last due to the extreme pressures associated with deployments. The Marine Corps Manpower Quarterly magazine July 1993 compared divorce rate statistics for the enlisted grades. It reported a two-fold increase in the divorce percentage in the grades of private through corporal since 1983. The concern identified by M&RA was that an increase in

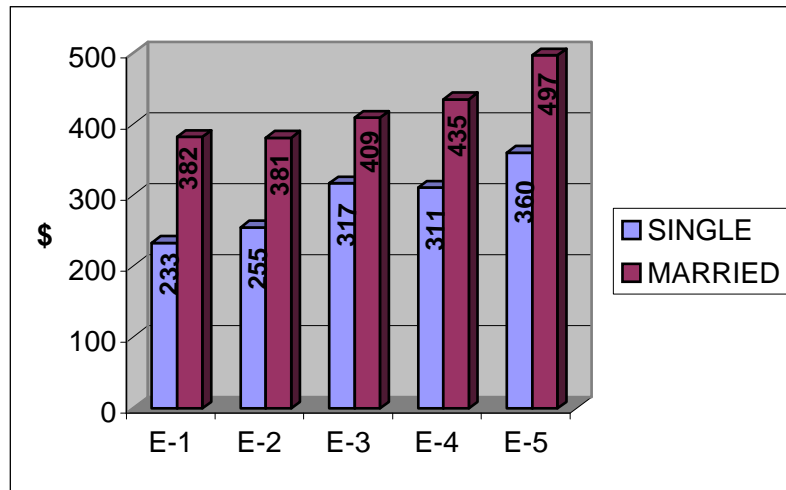
deployment rate in conjunction with the force draw down would require increased manpower and fiscal resources to care for the ill-equipped first-term dependents remaining behind.

First-term marriages impact heavily on unit training. According to the M&RA study, later confirmed by a DoD study, an inordinate amount of the Marine Corps junior officers' and Staff Non-Commissioned Officers' (SNCO's) time is spent on educating first-term Marines and their families on such basic tasks as budgeting, balancing checkbooks, and setting up households. A common challenge voiced among small unit leaders is that 90 percent of their time is spent with only 10 percent of their people. While the percentage distribution may be impressionistic, the implication is well understood. Leader's are responsible for those in their charge, problems of married Marines are usually more complex than those of single Marines. Often times personal and marital counseling is required to resolve family problems. Accommodating requests for additional time off for Marines is often required so that they can accompany their dependants during visits to the hospital or the commissary. An individual Marines' absence during unit training is difficult to quantify but does strain unit readiness. Marines are trained to fight as a team whether as a crew of a weapons system or as part of a small unit. An M1A1 tank, to be employed effectively and safely, requires one driver, one gunner, one loader, and one tank commander. The four-man crew must train and function as a team to maximize the effects of the weapons system. By denying the tank crew a member of its team for training, the tank as a weapons system is degraded in its readiness and capability. The same example can be applied at the unit level where each individual weapon system must train together to function as one cohesive unit.

Another aspect of unit readiness that is influenced by first-term marriage is unit cohesion. Drawing largely from past personal experiences and from those of others who have served in the small unit environment, single Marines more so than their married comrades are viewed as more available with regards to duty assignments and deployments. As discussed earlier, young married Marines who find themselves in troublesome personal situations are often afforded additional time off from work whether in garrison, in the field, or even from deployments. Married Marines are also paid at a higher rate through dependent entitlements. Equal pay for equal work, and shouldering a fair share of the difficult duties is expected but not delivered to each Marine, which can create animosity and degrade cohesion within the unit.

The fiscal reality of marriage for the first-term Marine does not usually become apparent until it is too late. Many young single Marines who view marriage as financially lucrative while living in the barracks quickly find that the expense of supporting a family on the local economy far exceeds the monetary allowances to which they are entitled.

The relative availability of Marine Corps base housing is not commensurate with the numbers of junior Marine families. Despite the additional housing and subsistence entitlements provided by pay grade for married service members, the total amount received by junior Marines, as illustrated in Figure 4-1,³⁴ is still relatively low compared to the actual expense of living on the civilian economy.³⁵ Security deposits, utilities, to include hook-up costs, and of course food become out of pocket expenses from a very meager allowance.



Single/Married housing entitlement differentials for 1991

Figure 4-1

The myth of free housing and free medical, supported by the Marine Recruiter's skillful use of the "benefit tags",³⁶ provide alternatives to young people not offered in the civilian sector. According to the M&RA study, support of first-term marriages is helping to create a class of poor Marines, some of which must turn to funded food stamps and other like programs.³⁷ The depth of the problem can be illustrated by the creation of programs such as "Adopt a Family," where officers assist young military families in need during the holiday season.

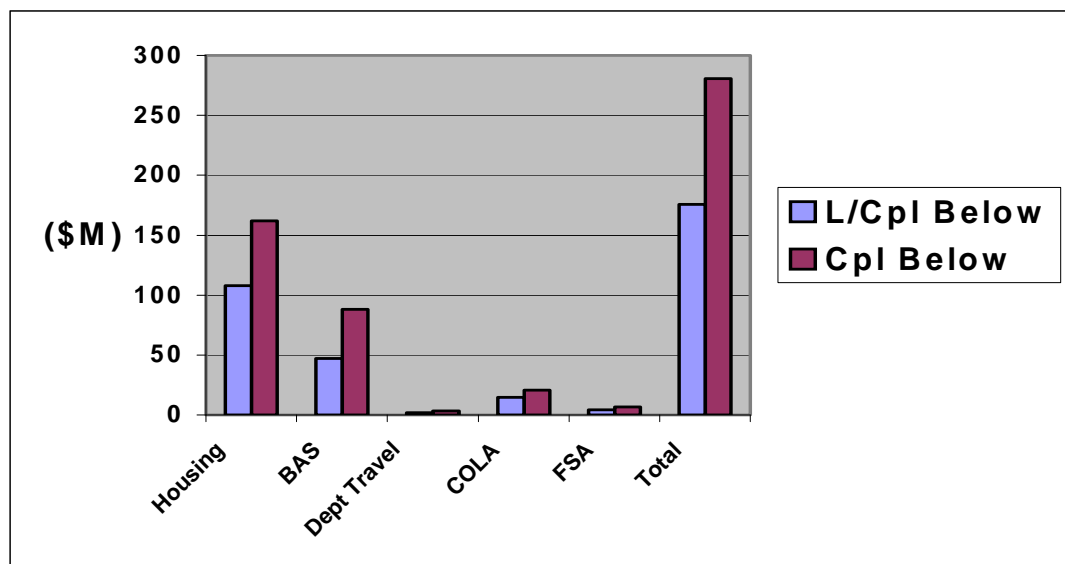
In terms of Quality of Life (QOL), great emphasis must be placed on the career force and the well being of their families. The career force represents less than one third of the enlisted force structure, and therefore receives a disproportionately smaller share of the limited human resource management dollars available. Of the first-term force, forty percent³⁸ of which were married in 1993, only ten percent were expected to reenlist. In 1992 the Human Resource facilities (i.e. Family counseling, housing referrals, and child care) were estimated to have provided twice as much in services to families of first-term Marines than to career force families. In addition, first-term families in 1992 occupied

nearly twelve thousand units of military family quarters. A major concern of M&RA, in their report to the Commandant, was that the first-term families were absorbing the majority of the available resources at the expense of the career force, while retention of married first-term Marines was relatively low.

The Marine Corps is committed to the motto “we take care of our own” and therefore obligated to provide for the families of Marines who have committed themselves to a career. Meeting its QOL obligations across the force in an era of inadequate military budgets requires the reallocation of fiscal resources. In 1993, the share of the Marine Corps Total Obligation Authority (TOA) spent on Military Personnel (MILPERS) (active duty troops pay and benefits) was 65 percent, leaving the remaining 35 percent to operations and maintenance, procurement and modernization, and the reserve forces. The Army, Air Force, and Navy’s MILPERS allocations were 36 percent, 22 percent and 26 percent respectively. However, because of the Marine Corps allocation of the DoD TOA, \$9.2B compared to the Army at \$63.6B, Air Force \$84.2B, Navy, \$75.6B, its average pay and benefits dollar cost per active duty service member is only \$34K, as compared to the Army’s \$42K, Air Force’s 42.6K, and Navy’s 39.1K.³⁹ The point is that the Marine Corps in 1993, with an overwhelming majority of its budget already allocated to MILPERS, had no flexibility in its budget to reinforce the overburdened human resource initiatives that were being consumed primarily by a 90 percent transient population. Increasing MILPERS allocations would result in decreased spending on equipment modernization and impact heavily on funding for training operations, ammunition, and equipment repairs. Clearly, without an increase in TOA, the Marine Corps was forced to

balance the QOL of its personnel, with the ability to accomplish its assigned mission as directed by the 47th Congress.

The most staggering finding of the M&RA study pertained to the fiscal cost of sponsoring junior Marine families. In terms of end strength, the Marine Corps forgoes the equivalent of 6000 Marines to pay for the dependents of lance corporals and below and the equivalent of 9500 Marines to pay for the dependents of corporals and below.⁴⁰ In other words, based on 1993 data, the Marine Corps could afford to buy 9,500 additional Marines, approximately one full infantry regiment, with the money it spends on caring for the dependents of corporals and below. Figure 4-2 demonstrates the entitlements offered to first-term Corporals and below.⁴¹



Total entitlements paid to first-term families for 1992

Figure 4-2

Based upon the M&RA study, General C. E. Mundy Jr., Thirtieth Commandant of the Marine Corps, decided on 5 August 1993, to publish a policy to all Marines (ALMAR) 226/93 titled: *“Fostering Responsible Choices for first-Term Marines.”* The

intent of the ALMAR was to express concern over personal hardships encountered by married Marines in serving in their initial enlistment and the impact it was having on the limited family resources available.⁴² He also stated that changes needed to be made in the interest of maintaining readiness. ALMAR 226/93 set forth the following actions to address the problem:

A. Recruiting Commanders will:

- 1) Limit the number of married non-prior service regular accessions in accordance with the following time table.

-FY94 - not more than 4 percent of the accession requirement

-FY95 - not more than 2 percent of the accession requirement

-FY96 and beyond - None

- 2) To the extent practical and as appropriate, inform prospective Marines at pool functions, family nights, and other forums about the challenging nature of duty as a Marine, to include:

(A) High operational tempo, frequent deployments, and periods of separation which Marines in the operating forces routinely face and

(B) The significant strain which such necessary absences can have on new marriages, especially one involving very junior Marines who with only modest salaries are often incapable of successfully handling the added financial burdens of marriage.

- B. An educational awareness program on the advantages of delaying marriage will consist of classes to be given in three phases. Phase one will be conducted during recruit training. Phase two will serve to reinforce phase one and will be conducted at

Marine Combat Training at the School of Infantry. Phase three will consist of additional marriage awareness education classes and will be given annually as part of yearly troop information training.

C. It is Marine Corps policy that first-term Marines who desire to marry consult with their commanding officer prior to marriage. This consultation requirement will not be misconstrued as a requirement to obtain permission to marry. Rather, it is an opportunity for the Marine to get counseling on one of the single most important decisions in his /her life, and benefit from the advice of seasoned Marines who have experienced military family life. At the very minimum, consultation will alert the command of an impending marriage to provide for efficient necessary administrative actions. Commanders are strongly encouraged to include their senior SNCO's in the counseling process. Chaplains and family service center representatives are also valuable resources.

D. Marines who opt to marry despite educational awareness and command counseling will be required to attend marriage workshops prior to marriage, or immediately thereafter. Spouses will be highly encouraged to participate in marriage workshops. In addition, an informal pamphlet entitled "Marriage and Military Life" will be published and distributed throughout the Marine Corps.

ALMAR 226/93 concluded with the Commandant's direction that the initiatives outlined above were to begin immediately, driving home the point to all Marines that operational readiness and the quality of life of our Marine family demands it.

ALMAR 226/93's release was met by the media and those in the Washington D.C. political community antagonistic to the military with harsh condemnation. Accusations

of an “anti-family” sentiment and infringements against basic human rights were slung carelessly, and without merit at the Marine Corps leadership.⁴³ What tended to be the liberal response to the Marine Corps initiative, championed primarily by Representative Patricia Schroeder, appeared to reflect the view that the military exists in large to serve two primary roles.⁴⁴ First, due to its regimentation, organizational structure, and vast budget, the military is often viewed by social reformers as a platform for social engineering.⁴⁵ Second, the military personnel support infrastructure provides an environment in where services members are free to exercise their constitutional freedoms such as marriage or single parenthood without the fear of paying the price for economic failure. In other words, the military is viewed again by social reformers as another federally funded workhorse capable of pulling the over flowing welfare cart. The ALMAR’s opponents overlooked the hardships faced by young families struggling with the realities of service life.

In fact, the Marine Corps was portrayed as possessing an “anti-family” sentiment by its political and media adversaries, despite the clearly written intent of the ALMAR. The harshness of their response begs the question as to whether or not they ever read the ALMAR. The simple answer was to force the services to reorganize their priorities.⁴⁶ Those in support of the Marine Corps initiative tended to be more focused on the practical application of the military and trusted in the ability of the Marine Corps leadership to balance its capabilities with the welfare of its personnel.⁴⁷ The merits of the ALMAR’s initiative were rapidly overshadowed by criticism over the manner in which the directive was released. Ultimately, General Mundy dutifully and publicly apologized for his breach of procedure. ALMAR 226/93 was rescinded by the Secretary of Defense,

Les Aspin, one week after its release. Politically, the media driven power struggle over the control of the military was ceremoniously restored back to the Clinton administration.⁴⁸ Despite the humiliation born by the Commandant, substantial attention was successfully directed at the problems identified by the controversial ALMAR. Most significantly, Secretary of Defense Les Aspin directed a DoD wide study be conducted to identify issues surrounding the family status of the first-term force, and its impact on military readiness. If the Commandant's assessment was correct, the study would confirm it and establish a basis for a new DoD policy.

V

Is there really a problem?

To me, the very fact that this issue is being discussed and this meeting is being held simply shows that you don't take the military seriously. For you, the military is not a question of life and death...so you can afford to make all kinds of social experiments, which we cannot...The very fact that you have this debate may itself be constructed as proof that it's not serious. It's a game. It's a joke.

Professor Martin Van Creveld

As a civil-military relations continued to struggle in the wake of the “Don’t ask, don’t tell” policy surrounding gays serving in the military, the Marine Corps’ proposal to discriminate against enlisting married applicants sparked a great deal of negative publicity for both the DoD and the Clinton administration.⁴⁹ Because this issue was posed as an over extension of military authority, civilian control over the military was reestablished quickly and very publicly. Fortunately, the concern that real problems may have existed regarding dependency and operational readiness was not lost so this politically sensitive issue maintained momentum. The DoD study, *Family Status and Initial Term of Service*, initiated by Les Aspin in August 1993, directly responded to the Marine Corps’ dilemma. Additionally, the Marine Corps commissioned the Center for Naval Analysis (CNA) to conduct a formal study into the influence of marital and dependency status on performance in the first-term force.

Conducted under the direction of the honorable Edward Dorn, Assistant Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness (ASDP&R), the *Family Status and Initial Term of Service* study demanded full DoD wide participation. The study’s directive was to “address operational tempo, marriage, stress, pregnancy, divorce, finances, dependent

services, substance abuse, and other factors as they affect individual enlistees, rates of retention, quality of force, and readiness.”⁵⁰ To satisfy the directive the study sought specifically to address three basic questions: (1) What patterns of marriage do service members exhibit? (2) Do patterns of marriage matter to the service or the individual? (3) What, if any, changes to policies and programs should the DoD consider in light of the answers to the first two questions?⁵¹

Generally, military personnel policies are designed to provide balance between three competing objectives: to enhance readiness, to spend taxpayer resources wisely, and to treat service members fairly. The study provided the following findings:

- ◆ The study group found no clear, statistically valid quantitative relationship, positive or negative, between marital status and readiness.
- ◆ Deployability is a key indicator of individual readiness. Reflecting their diverse missions, the several services have markedly different patterns of assignment, location, and deployment.
- ◆ The vast majorities of members, regardless of marital status or dependents, deploy when ordered. However, service members with dependents report more problems getting ready to deploy than do members without dependents.
- ◆ Married members tend to have slightly fewer performance and behavior problems. However, problems of married members tend to be more complex and much more time consuming for commanders, distracting those commanders from mission-oriented activities and leading to a perception that marital status has a significant impact on readiness.

- ◆ While marriage in the first-term may pose challenges to the member, many members consider a strong marriage key to a successful long-term career in the military.
- ◆ Many married junior enlisted members have financial problems, especially in localities with high off base housing costs. Finances and housing problems are at the root of many other problems which service member's experience in the first-term. Service members and families frequently lack key information about compensation, financial management, and housing.
- ◆ Most members and spouses who take advantage of support programs are satisfied with the services they receive. However, not all members take advantage of the programs. Service members and families frequently lack key information about support programs available to them.

With regard to the disparity between the services in areas such as deployment tempo, cost of living considerations, and family support programs, the Marine Corps was identified as over taxed across the board. In the 1993 time frame, the average married airman could expect to spend one month deployed during his first four year term while the average Marine could expect to spend nearly a year deployed in the same term.⁵² Problems associated with cost of living expenses were found to be highest in the naval services due to their proximity to high cost areas such as coastal cities and trading ports.

The recommendations for action, delivered by the study, were directly in line with the dilemma outlined in ALMAR 226/93. Without committing to a negative impact on readiness, the study instead addressed deficiencies in QOL for service members with dependents and without. Recommendations for action included creating a higher

awareness through education directed at improving life choices among junior enlisted service members, and drastically improving military family support programs. Most importantly, the study recommended improvements in family housing. In consideration of the great discrepancy in the per-capita expenditures for family programs between the Marine Corps and the other services⁵³ the study group recommended that “additional funds be provided to the Marine Corps. These additional funds were to meet program requirements and to allow the Commandant to address some of the most pressing problems in these Marine Corps problem areas.”⁵⁴

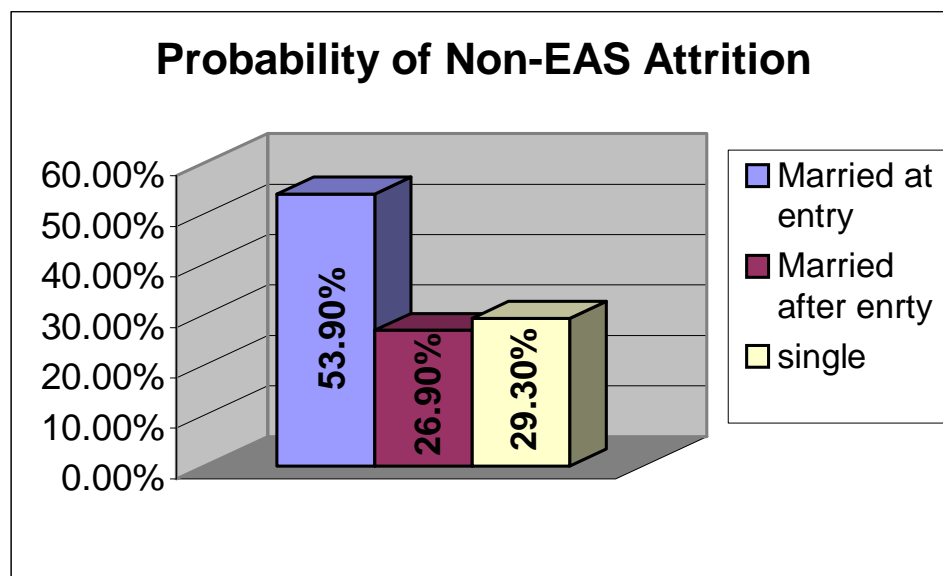
The 1994 CNA Study *Work and the Family in the Marine Corps: The Relationship Between Performance and Dependency Status* was prompted by the Marine Corps to determine the influence, if any, of marital and dependency status on performance in the first-term force. In pursuing their task, this basic question was asked: are there performance differences between Marines who are married or have dependents and single Marines? The bottom line for the Marine Corps was whether or not it needed to pursue lowering its first-term marriage and dependency rates.

CNA analyzed performance in three stages of a Marines’ career: at entry level, during their first-term of service, and beyond the first-term of service. The indicator of performance at entry level was attrition from recruit training. Performance indicators for the first-term Marine were non end of active service (non-EAS) attrition, and promotion to corporal by completion of the first-term of service. Retention/reenlistment served as an indicator of performance for Marines beyond the first-term of service. The theme that remained constant throughout the study was that Marines assessed into the Marine Corps

as married or with dependents, posed the highest degree of failure in attrition, promotion and retention/reenlistment.

Traditionally, the Marine Corps averages approximately 5-6 percent married accessions each year. Generally married recruits are found to attrite from training at only a slightly higher rate than single recruits, which increases the overall probability of recruit training attrition by about 2 percentage points. Given the total costs of recruiting and training the increased expense equates to less than \$0.5 million per year. (CNA study p2)

Analysis of first-term attrition followed a similar trend with a difference of only 2 percent between married and single Marine attrition. The cost per year associated with the increased attrition probability of married Marines equaled approximately \$10 million.



Non-EAS attrition comparison between dependency cohorts

Figure 5-1

The interesting fact revealed in this study was that the non-EAS attrition found in married Marines was attributed to Marines who were already married upon entering the service.

In other words, in terms of attrition, Marines who marry after recruit training are less likely to experience attrition than Marines married at accession, or even single Marines.⁵⁵

With regard to promotion as a performance indicator, Marines who marry after recruit training were seen as competitive, or more so, for promotion to corporal as single Marines. In hands on job performance it was determined that Marines married after accession usually performed at a slightly higher level than single Marines. When considering the entry level and non-EAS attrition already suffered by Marines who were married at accession, it is of little surprise that that particular cohort also demonstrated the poorest level of performance as compared to single/no dependents, or Marines married after recruit training.

As with the performance indicators of the first two stages of the study, Marines married after entry level were more likely to reenlist than Marines married at accession and were on par with single Marines. Taken in total the CNA study suggested that attrition and retention beyond the first-term was primarily a problem for those Marines married at the time of accession. Married Marines and single Marines were found to get promoted, and to reenlist generally at the same rate. In short, the study concluded that some of our most responsible individuals tend to shoulder the added responsibility of marriage, not that marriage makes them more responsible. An immature or irresponsible individual will tend to not only be a substandard Marine, but be involved in a marriage plagued by problems and conflict.⁵⁶

From the perspective of the study, no substantial cost implications were uncovered that would easily negate the value of a first-term married Marine. The study

did not, however, reach into the long-term costs of maintaining a large first-term force with increased dependency rates, and the impact that would be placed on unit readiness.

Both the DoD and CNA studies concluded with roughly the same results. Service members who are married or have dependents are capable of contributing to the readiness of the military on equal terms with singles or those without dependents. However, two very important factors emerged that form the basis for the dependency vs. readiness. First, there is no universally accepted standard established throughout the DoD to evaluate or qualify individual readiness of any cohort (i.e., single, married, single parent, or dual service). The absence of such qualifications implies that personnel policies directed at evaluating overall performance are insufficient as a true measure of individual worth. No effective system is currently in place to facilitate the tracking of performance trends among specific cohorts. Status of Resources and Training System (SORTS) reporting is a DoD system designed to identify the status of unit readiness, but does not identify how the status is achieved. To ensure that deploying units are fully and expertly manned to do what they are called upon to do, services commonly employ a measure of “cross-leveling,” or “cross-decking,” which generally means that individuals are required to accelerate their normal deployment cycle.⁵⁷ A system, such as SORTS, that openly permits “workarounds” as a common fix, cannot be expected to provide quality feedback concerning the impact of individual readiness. The second factor revealed by the studies was that maintaining a capable force heavy with military dependents requires resources that far exceeds what congress and the president are willing to authorize.

In the next chapter both the moral and financial costs of maintaining such a force will be examined to determine the logic of satisfying the country’s social conscience as

opposed to maximizing military capabilities within a constrained fiscal environment. Furthermore, to understand the true dilemma of the Marine Corps dependency issue initially identified in 1993, we will shift focus from a macro level perspective of DoD budgets and QOL initiatives, to the micro level perspective of the demands placed on the individual services.

VI

The Cost of doing Business in America

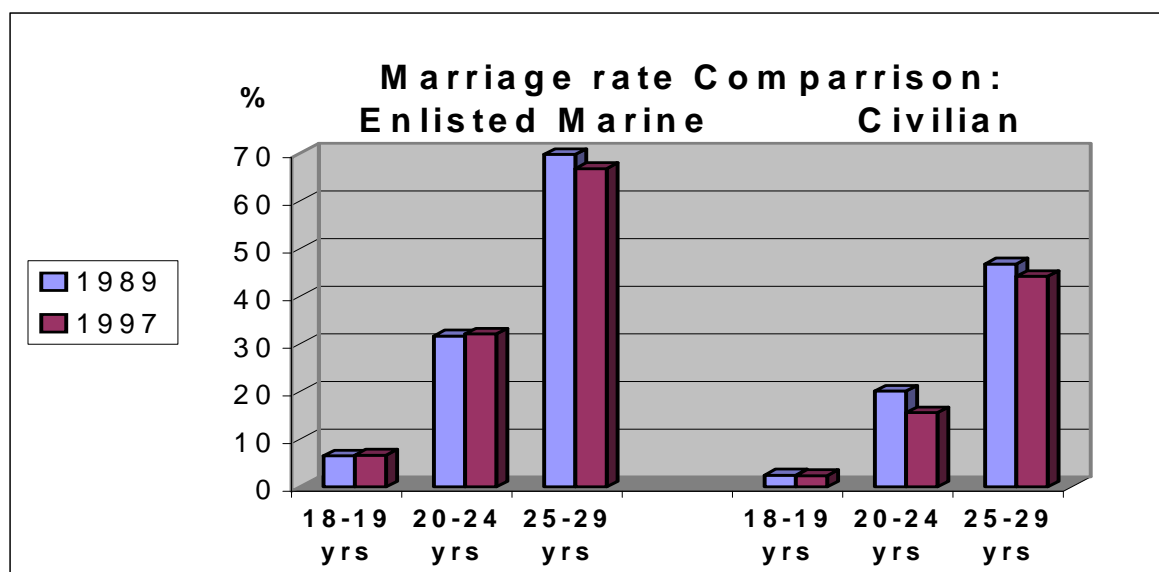
Do what you can, with what you have, where you are.

Theodore Roosevelt

Despite ALMAR 226/93's initial derailment its merits were partially vindicated by Les Aspins directed study. In direct recognition of the funding problems addressed in the ALMAR, the study group recommended that additional funding be provided to the Marine Corps for the purpose of improving its family support programs.⁵⁸ However, beyond QOL concerns, there was no direct link made between an individual service's level of operational readiness, and the dependency rate of service members serving in their first-term. The Marine Corps commissioned CNA study, focused on job performance, also failed to demonstrate a substantial negative cause and effect relationship between first-term dependency status and the performance of one's duties.⁵⁹ As a result of these combined findings, and until evidence can be provided to prove otherwise, it would be irresponsible to make the claim that Marines, who acquire dependents during their first-term of service, perform at a level that negatively impacts Marine Corps operational readiness. A claim that can be made and supported regarding the first-term marriages and their negative impact on operational readiness is that the fiscal demands associated with managing such a large first-term married force far exceeds the Marine Corps' annual budget. Under current funding profiles, the Marine Corps is not capable of adequately sustaining programs associated with near and far term

operational requirements while simultaneously providing for the welfare of a growing dependency base.

The arguments made in 1993 regarding affordability are still as relevant, or even more so, today. The cost associated with dependency can be viewed not only in real dollars spent per year, but also in the forgone opportunities for modernization, infrastructure and readiness. A 1998 CNA study revealed Marines, especially enlisted personnel, marry at twice the national average.⁶⁰ In a rough comparison between civilian males and enlisted Marine males,⁶¹ the Marines tended to be more likely to marry than civilians in comparable age categories.



Comparison between civilian and Marine propensity to marry

Figure 6-1

Figure 6-1 demonstrates the large gap between the two categories, which until 1995 was steadily widening.⁶² Determining why Marines marry at a higher rate was addressed in a supporting CNA study. The study inferred that many junior enlisted Marines perceived that marriage equates to more money, a means to escape “barracks life” while being

afforded free housing, and an increase in personal luxuries. Generally, junior Marines marry because they choose to and because, in their judgement, they believe it an affordable endeavor. In fiscal year 1998 the Marine Corps had approximately 103,000 first-term enlisted Marines from the ranks of private to corporal.⁶³ From that number 26,100 or roughly 25% were married. Conversely, based on 1997 U.S. Census data, only about 11.6% of men age 18-24 in the general population are married. Considering that the Marine Corps is about 95% male, the national rate serves as an appropriate base line.⁶⁴ There are few jobs existing in America's civilian sector that offer young men or women between the ages of 18-24 a benefits package comparable to that offered by the U.S. military. Continuing to provide such incentive to marry, thus increasing overhead costs, defies logic in an environment of continual budget constraints. Only in 1998, during the service chiefs' individual testimonies to congress, did the truth about the readiness shortfalls in the U.S. military become public knowledge.

Even though still very high today, the dependency rate among junior Marines has slightly decreased since 1995.⁶⁵ Between 1999 and 2000 alone, the Marine Corps reduced its number of enlisted dependents by approximately 5000 spouses and children despite no change in its active duty end strength.⁶⁶ General J. L. Jones, the Corps' newest Commandant, believes that the marriage rate among junior Marines is still too high, "Marines are marrying too early." According to General Jones, the Marine Corps will continue to work with the "problem" by providing professional pre-marriage counseling, and continue the efforts to enhance QOL for single Marines, thus reducing their need to use marriage as means to escape the austerity of barracks life.⁶⁷

A modification of entry level training was proposed in ALMAR 226/93 as a means to help young Marines evaluate the pros and cons of balancing marriage against the demands of military service. In reality, however, the initiative to formalize marriage awareness training at the entry level never fully materialized. According to Training and Education Division, MCCDC there is and has been no system put in place that resembles the level of effort outlined in ALMAR 226/93.⁶⁸ Currently, the only formalized marriage awareness training occurs at recruit training under the appropriate but broader subject of “Core Values and Leadership Training.” A total of 1-hour is dedicated to “Marriage and the First-Term Marine,” and one-hour dedicated to “Sexual Responsibility.”⁶⁹ The general message put forth in both one-hour periods of instruction was that Marines must take personal responsibility for their own actions. By emphasizing, to young Marines, the overall benefits of remaining single the Marine Corps in effect raised the expectations of young Marines. The Corps is challenged with the task of making single life more appealing to the first-term force than married life.

There have been many consistencies between studies as to why Marines marry in the first-term. Among the most prominent is that Marines marry to seek a better QOL. In response to that belief the Marine Corps has prioritized programs focused on improving QOL for the single Marine. One example that clearly illustrates the Marine Corps’ commitment to this is the drastic increase of resources applied toward barracks (i.e., bachelor enlisted quarters (BEQ)) renovation. Between the years 1993 and 1998 the resources applied to bachelor housing renovations more than tripled, growing from \$52.2M in 1993 to \$162.6M in 1998.⁷⁰ In addition to renovations, General C.C. Krulak released ALMAR 106/98⁷¹ in an effort to foster an overall better living environment for

Marines living in the BEQ's. ALMAR 106/98 was followed by the 1999 BEQ Campaign Plan which reinforced the efforts to "sustain discipline, core values, and QOL of our junior Marines."⁷² In addition to the campaign plan, there has been a considerable focus of effort placed on providing services and activities for single Marines.

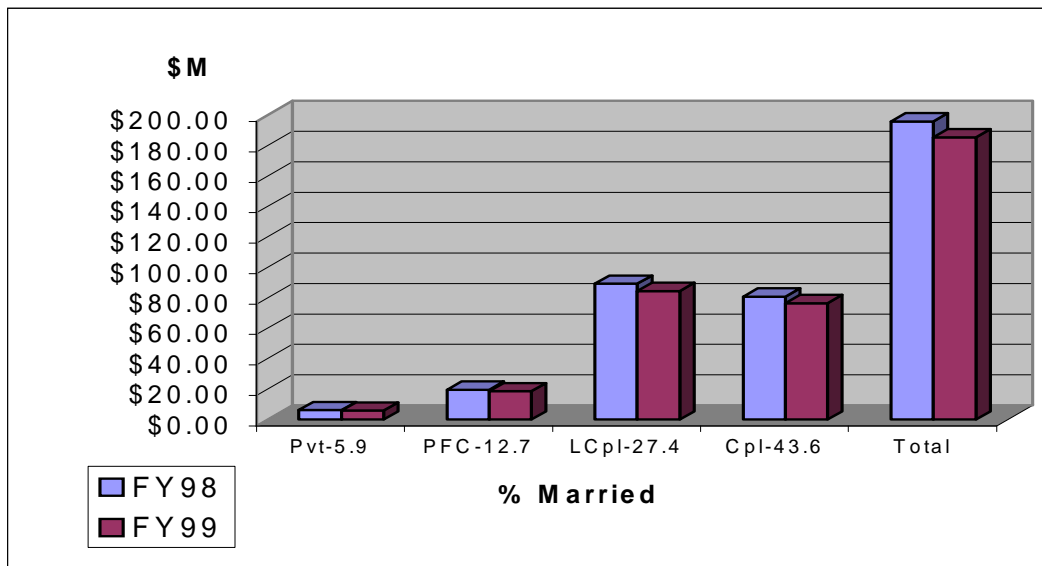
Despite the efforts to reduce first-term dependency, the reality of a large first-term dependent population continues to exist. In 1998, the Marine Corps developed the Marine Corps Community Services (MCCS) concept as the future of taking care of Marines and their families. The MCCS bundles the capabilities of previous support systems such as Morale Welfare and Recreation (MWR), Family Services, and Voluntary Education. The MCCS mission is to "sustain quality of life today and into the next century."⁷³ The primary purpose of MCCS is to bring simplicity and efficiency to the Marine Corps QOL effort by placing all functions of QOL support under the centralized authority of the base, station, or installation commander. In 1998 the challenge identified by MCCS was to provide support to more than 173,000 active duty Marines and their 173,000 family members.⁷⁴ Childcare is among the programs most in need of attention. According to a 1998 MCCS study, 57 percent of Marine Corps spouses are employed, with 70 percent employed full time. As a result, in the past 6-7 years, the budget for child development centers has increased from \$13.0M to \$22.9M. Since 1993, there has been more than \$200M in Marine Corps and Secretary of Defense money applied to increase QOL within the Marine Corps. As a result of this effort, the standards of QOL are effectively improving and with it satisfaction throughout the active duty force.⁷⁵ The Marine Corps has a long standing claim of "taking care of our own," however, in a modern and more pragmatic view, the Marine Corps is under pressure to "provide" to the

standards set by the current civilian economy and societal norms. Failing to meet the set standards is expected to impact significantly on personnel retention.

The real dilemma being faced by the Marine Corps today is that it exists within a society that demands more than it is willing to pay for. As previously indicated, first-term Marines, married after accession, perform and reenlist at only a slightly higher rate than single Marines. In effect the Marine Corps is paying higher overhead for virtually the same performance, and getting less return on investment. In today's fiscally constrained DoD environment, the service chiefs are currently required to choose between equipment modernization and increased childcare facilities. It would appear prudent to reduce service overhead where possible. The cost of maintaining such an overhead is evidenced in the past and current Marine Corps initiatives to bolster family service programs and family housing. Initiatives to provide for the dependents' claimed by first-term Marines or to reduce their overall numbers has required a considerable financial commitment. Despite the Marine Corps' success at improving QOL in the past six years, the true measure of success will be determined by the actual capability of the force. Continually robbing from modernization and readiness to pay for QOL initiatives is an annual challenge in the Marine Corps Program Objective Memorandum (POM) process in which the Corps must prioritize its annual budget allocations. By establishing priorities to support QOL initiatives aimed at sustaining a large dependency population, the Marine Corps should anticipate diminishing "warfighting" capabilities in the future unless it experiences an increase in its budget allocation.

Of the roughly 26,000 married first-term Marines, about 7,000 live in government quarters while the remainder live in off-base quarters. The total direct expense, above

what a single Marine costs the Corps, was about \$196M for fiscal year 1998, and \$185M for fiscal year 1999. Those figures equate to an average of more than \$7,500 per junior enlisted Marine for fiscal year 1998, and \$7,100 for fiscal year 1999. These marginal costs do not include medical, dental, family separations allowance, family service center staffing, or incidentals such as time lost for family emergencies.”⁷⁶ Figure 6-2 illustrates the marginal costs associated with first-term dependency.



FY 98-99 Marginal costs associated with first-term dependency

Figure 6-2

The Marine Corps has and will always fund near term readiness first.⁷⁷ When considering the limited flexibility in the Marine Corps Total Obligation Authority (TOA) and the Budget Authority (BA)⁷⁸, funds from modernization programs (PMC, RDT&E) are often reallocated to cover shortfalls. The priority of QOL across DoD, combined with the increased overhead associated with supporting a high percentage of first-term Marines with dependents, directly impedes the Marine Corps ability to effectively prepare for future operational success.

As discovered in 1993, resolving the issue of first-term dependency is not a task that can be approached casually. In the seven years since the releases of ALMAR 226/93, the emotionally charged issue continues to be debated openly throughout the Marine Corps. To date, there has been no evidence provided to prove that a first-term Marine's status with regard to dependency negatively impacts on operational readiness. Many experienced leaders believe that the lack of evidence is due to inconclusive studies. As a result of the "lack of evidence dilemma," my first recommendation to address the dependency issue is for the Marine Corps to establish a standardized and objective method of determining preparedness of individual Marines. The method chosen must not succumb to emotional bias, but should include both internal and external evaluations.

Today, as in 1993, the Marine Corps possesses several means to evaluate individual readiness objectively. One approach to meeting the evaluation criteria was offered in the 1996 article: Tell it to the Marines: Marriage and the first-term Force.⁷⁹ The author provided a comprehensive and manageable threefold method of evaluation. First, the author suggested that the Marine Corps review the essential skills and knowledge necessary for a Marine to accomplish his or her individual tasks. Once evaluated, these skills and knowledge will provide a reasonable determination of individual readiness. The Individual Training Standards (ITS)⁸⁰ lists combat essential tasks, requiring a specific knowledge and skill level for each rank, it also provides a starting point. Additionally, Marines below the rank of First Sergeant/Master Sergeant must pass an Essential Subjects Test (EST) every year. An individual Marine's composite score is yet another means to gauge individual readiness. Composite scores are used to gain promotion to the rank of corporal or sergeant consisting of quantifiable items

based on individual performance such as physical fitness, rifle range score, and successful completion of professional military or off duty education. The Individual Records Administration Manual⁸¹ lists standards for individual personal and professional conduct for pay grades E-1 through E-4. Known as proficiency and conduct marks, they are used by Marine leaders to provide an objective measure for determining individual readiness. M&RA possesses the capability to compile the deployability status of its personnel and determine whether status is an adverse factor. M&RA can access EST, composite score, and proficiency and conduct information from its data base and list average scores. As a second evaluation method, the author suggested that M&RA calculate the average score of Marines, with and without dependents, for every battalion-sized unit within the Marine Corps. By doing so, it would provide a clearer picture of the working level, or micro level of the Marine Corps. Third, the author suggested that a scoring system be designed to identify the minimum standard of readiness. Those units who fail to comply with any of the reporting criteria listed above would be immediately identified as having a personnel readiness problem.

The author of the previously illustrated evaluation method also possessed a keen grasp of legitimacy. For the purposes of avoiding the perception of bias, he recommended the Marine Corps contract with an independent firm to evaluate more subjective areas. The very nature of the study would demand an unbiased and detached evaluation because it measures intangible items. Through a campaign of personal interviews, surveys, and on-site observations used to collect data, the firm would attempt to evaluate unit cohesion, esprit, leadership qualities, maturity and self-esteem. Upon completion of the data collection and evaluation, the evaluating agency could effectively

provide a detached assessment on the influence of dependency status on unit and individual readiness. Armed with more detailed facts resulting from the combined efforts listed above, the Marine Corps could logically evaluate statistical performance data that it could further justify with facts provided by an unbiased viewpoint. The Marine Corps could then, from a position of greater strength, push to implement policies to restrict marriage if deemed appropriate.

The directives outlined in ALMAR 226/93 failed not necessarily because they lacked validity, but instead, because the issues were not properly presented in political terms. With appropriate preparation and forewarning, some believe that ALMAR 226/93 would have received appropriate presidential support. However, even if new studies could prove a direct negative relationship between first-term dependency and readiness, beyond the fiscal shortfalls, it does not appear that prohibiting dependency among first-term Marines is currently in the Marine Corps' best interest.

Americans have enjoyed an incredibly successful economy throughout the 1990's, which is anticipated to continue into the next century. With that in mind, it would be unrealistic for the Marine Corps to voluntarily omit qualified married applicants, who are otherwise fully qualified for enlistment, from the pool of qualified military applicants. A strong economy generally equates to a lower propensity to enlist in the Armed Forces. If that trend continues, the Marine Corps will soon be facing the annual accession shortfalls currently plaguing its sister services. Closely related to accessions is service member retention and manpower end strength. The Marine Corps must optimize its return on investment through a reduced rate of Non-EAS attrition and by meeting its required reenlistment rate, which is generally 20-22 percent per fiscal year. One MCCS motto is

that the Marine Corps “enlists Marines, and reenlists families.”⁸² That sentiment demonstrates a level of commitment to providing for Marines and their families. A violation of that commitment could result not only in a drop in public support, which is in effect the Marine Corps’ lifeblood,⁸³ but would also a drop in retention rates. In a society that currently presents many options to its youth, it is imperative that the Marine Corps remain competitive for acquiring crucial manpower resources.

My second recommendation is that the Marine Corps continue to maintain its current status quo with regard to first-term dependency. This position does not diminish the need for evaluating the effects of first-term dependency. Those findings can be used for purposes other than promoting a policy to prohibit marriage. In concert with its many QOL commitments, the Marine Corps’ identification of negative or positive performance trends, and their relationship to dependency could be useful in validating and improving ongoing initiatives. I believe that efforts to promote the benefits of single Marine Life through initiatives such as the “Single Marine Program”⁸⁴ and the BEQ Campaign Plan will go a long way in reaching those Marines who are looking for a better level of QOL. Heightening awareness levels both formally and informally is also critical to the effort of reducing the propensity to marry. Despite the cost associated with maintaining such a large first-term force, it is a commitment the Marine Corps must adhere to. As inefficient as this all may seem, maintaining readiness in the shadow of a high standard of QOL is driven by a society that demands a great deal of return on a marginal investment. The American public demands that the U.S. Marine Corps always be ready to answer the call, while maximizing its success with limited casualties. The public also demands that the military serve as a platform for social change and a model for collective welfare.

What the American public is not in tune with is the cost of maintaining such an effective yet benevolent military. What they want, they are not usually enthusiastic to pay for. Consequently, my final recommendation is for the Marine Corps to push for a “Joint” standard of readiness and QOL. If a link can be made between first-term dependency and a reduction of Marine Corps readiness and capability, it will likely be centered on inadequate resources. The Marine Corps receives 4 percent of the DoD TOA

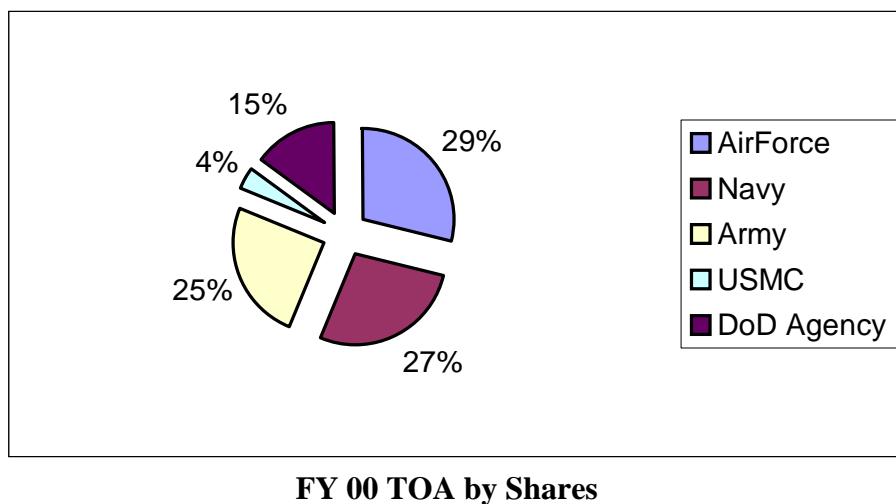


Figure 6-3

that equates to approximately \$11.7B for FY00. There is simply not enough money in the Marine Corps budget to adequately fund near term readiness and modernization while maintaining the increased overhead associated with a large degree of first-term dependency. Until the past 20 years, the expeditionary nature of our force has not demanded a robust family support infrastructure. MCCS will help greatly in bridging the QOL gap, but it will also continue to draw heavily on scarce resources. The Marine Corps has a long-standing tradition of always doing more with less. However, with the challenges associated with near term readiness, Operational Maneuver from the Sea, and a vastly growing QOL infrastructure, it is important to keep the public’s awareness and

interest at a peak. Without an adequate budget increase, the Marine Corps will be forced to continue robbing from one program to pay for another. In the end, no matter how one may choose to break it down, maintaining the excessive overhead associated with first-term dependency is limiting the Marine Corps' operational reach and effectiveness.

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